

REMARKS

Prior to entry of this amendment, claims 1-23 are pending. Applicant acknowledges with appreciation the Examiner's allowance of claims 3-7 and 23, and indication of allowable subject matter in claims 12 and 19.

By this amendment, claims 1, 2, 8, 11, 17 and 22 are amended and new claim 24 is added. No new matter is added. Thus, claims 1-24 are pending and subject to examination.

Favorable reconsideration of this application is respectfully requested in view of the foregoing amendments and following remarks.

Claim Objections

In the outstanding Office Action mailed January 18, 2005, claims 3-7 and 23 were allowed, and claims 12 and 19 were objected to as depending from a rejected base claim. Applicant respectfully submits that original claim 19 depends from claim 3, which was allowed in the outstanding Office Action. In addition, claim 11, from which claim 12 depends, has been amended to depend from claim 2. Claim 2 is now in condition for allowance, for the reasons set forth below. Accordingly, withdrawal of the objection to claims 12 and 19 is respectfully requested.

Claims Rejections

In the outstanding Office Action, claims 1 and 14-17 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,201,457 to Hickernell (hereinafter, "Hickernell '457"), claims 2 and 22 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Hickernell '457 in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,031,435 to Inose et al. (hereinafter, "Inose"), claims 8-10 were rejected as being unpatentable over

Hickernell '457 in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,313,177 to Hickernell (hereinafter, "Hickernell '177"), claims 11 and 13 were rejected as being unpatentable over Hickernell in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,777,855 to Bergmann et al. (hereinafter, "Bergmann"), claim 18 was rejected as being unpatentable over Hickernell '457 and Inose in view of Hickernell '177 and claims 20 and 21 were rejected as being unpatentable over Hickernell and Inose in view of Bergmann. It is noted that claims 1, 2, 8, 11 and 22 have been amended. To the extent that the rejections remain applicable to the claims currently pending, the Applicants hereby traverse the rejections, as follows.

Claims 1, 2, 8-18 and 20

By the foregoing amendment, independent claims 1 and 17 have been amended to include the allowable subject matter of claim 12, as well as the subject matter of claim 11, and independent claims 2 and 22 have been amended to include the allowable subject matter of claim 4. Thus, Applicant respectfully submits that independent claims 1, 2, 17 and 22 are in condition for allowance.

As claims 8-10 and 14-16 depend from claim 1, and claims 11-13, 18 and 20 depend from claim 2, it is respectfully submitted that claims 8-16, 18 and 20 are allowable for the same reasons as claims 1 and 2, as well as for the additional subject matter recited therein.

Claim 21

Original claim 21 depends from claim 3, which is allowed. Thus, claim 21 is allowable for the same reasons as claim 3, as well as for the additional subject matter recited therein.

New Claim 24

New claim 24 includes the allowable subject matter of claim 19, as well as the subject matter of original claims 1 and 12. Thus, Applicant respectfully submits that independent claim 24 is allowable for at least the same reasons as claim 19. Accordingly, an early and favorable action on new claim 24 is respectfully requested.

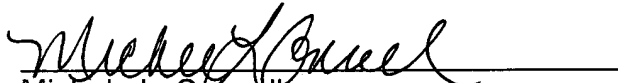
Conclusion

For all of the above reasons, it is respectfully submitted that claims 1-24 are in condition for allowance and a Notice of Allowability is earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner determine that any further action is necessary to place this application into condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned representative at the telephone number listed below.

In the event this paper is not considered to be timely filed, the Applicants hereby petition for an appropriate extension of time. The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any fee deficiency or credit any overpayment associated with this communication to Deposit Account No. 01-2300 referencing client matter number **025720-00013**.

Respectfully submitted,
Arent Fox, PLLC


Michele L. Connell
Registration No. 52,763

Customer No. 004372
1050 Connecticut Ave., N.W.
Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20036-5339
Telephone No. (202) 857-6104
Facsimile No. (202) 857-6395
CMM/MLC:sg